Unitarian Horizons

June 15, 1938

OUR SINGING STRENGTH

THE meetings of Anniversary Week this year were notable for many things, but I think the impression which will longest remain in my mind and heart is that of the songs we sang together, and the sense of unity and power which came to all who heard or shared them. Many of us discovered, perhaps for the first time, what may be described, in the words of Robert Frost, as "our singing strength." It was a moving

experience—a revelation not only of strength already present among us, but also of far greater promise of strength in days to come.

JUNIOR CHOIR FESTIVALS

IT began on Sunday afternoon, with the Junior Choir Festival in the First Church. Last year, nearly 400 boys and girls took part in this service. This year, there were nearly 500, members of Junior Choirs from 42 parish churches, from Laconia, New Hampshire, to New Bedford and Fairhaven, Massachusetts, and from as far inland as Fitchburg. Those who found places in the crowded church, in the pews set aside for adults, saw a great host of Unitarian young people, assembled to sing together as a token of their loyalty to their church and as a pledge of their devotion to the high ends of free religion. Those who had the privilege of hearing that great assembly sing will not soon forget it, and their faith in the future of our cause will not soon waver.

THREE GREAT HYMNS

THAT same evening, in Arlington Street Church, a congregation that filled the noble auditorium to its capacity heard David Rhys Williams, of Rochester, New York, the preacher of the Anniversary Sermon, whose

eloquence stirred and reassured us all. But earlier in the service we sang Theodore Williams's hymn, "Hast thou heard it, O my brother," to the magnificent melody "Ton-Y-Botel," and I cannot help believing that the singing strength which that hymn revealed was in part the source of the preacher's inspiration.

Then, on Wednesday evening, in the brief devotional service preceding the Ware Lecture, we sang Dr. Hedge's translation of "Ein Feste Burg"; and once again the lift of mighty music wedded to mighty words was felt by a great assembly. It was a perfect preparation for the magnificent address by John Haynes Holmes.

And then, at the close of the morning meeting on Thursday in Tremont Temple, we sang Felix Adler's hymn, "Hail the glorious golden city"; and it seemed a fitting climax to a session that had kindled new faith and confidence in many hearts.

UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN

THERE were other great hymns, greatly sung by large congregations, during the week; but those three stand out in my memory as specially significant. They constituted a new discovery of the strength of free religious fellowship, rooted and grounded in a great tradi-

tion, but reaching out with eager and expectant hope to the things that are still ahead. Their echoes will be heard in our parishes from coast to coast all through the coming year. The faith they expressed and helped create will be felt, like a rampart behind our backs, "until we meet again."

In that sort of experience lies the justification for our annual pilgrimage to Boston, and the ample reward for all that vast expenditure of time and energy that goes into the planning and conduct of our May Meetings. Somehow, we gather together and life is renewed among us. We mount up with wings as eagles; and the renewal of strength which comes to us is the guarantee that for another twelve months we can run and not be weary, walk and not faint.

TO THOSE AT HOME

BUT after all, the great assemblies in Boston are only a tiny fraction of our total strength. When a thousand delegates in Tremont Temple unite in song or in a pledge of loyalty, each one represents at least a hundred men and women who are not there. What of those Unitarians who cannot come to Boston for the annual meetings? How can they share the inspiration of the gatherings in which they do not participate?

The first answer is through the reports of the

delegates to their local churches. Too often, I am afraid, the church season is so far advanced by the time the delegates get home that the whole matter of bringing their reports to the attention of the church is difficult to achieve and easy to postpone. By fall, the vivid impressions of even the most enthusiastic delegates are apt to be dulled. Postponement very easily drifts into forgetfulness, and the local church remains very largely untouched by the inspiration and power of the Boston meetings. The General Conference fares better in this respect, because it usually comes in the early autumn, when a new church year is just getting started; but we ought not to let the date of the Annual Meeting become a serious obstacle to prevent our making adequate reports to the constituent churches. Here is a test of our practical ingenuity, which we surely can find some way of meeting!

TWO PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

IF every reader of these pages who was a delegate to this year's annual meeting will make a point of finding an opportunity to report that meeting to some parish gathering early in the fall, so that the spirit of that great assembly may be adequately conveyed to the local church, we could go a long way toward building up the sense of

wider unity and fellowship. A little thought given to the matter right now, before the memories of Anniversary Week have had a chance to fade, will bring important results at the opening of the new church year.

And if every reader of these pages who was *not* a delegate this year will make a point of reminding those who were delegates that their responsibility includes sharing their experience with those at home who could not get to the meetings, offering to help arrange opportunities early in the new season for such reports to be made, it would make a very great difference.

The report of the Board of Directors to the Association closed with an appeal to the delegates to regard themselves as ambassadors from the Annual Meeting to their parish churches, and this appeal goes to the heart of the problem. For practical purposes of the immediate transaction of business, the delegates are the Association; but in the deeper sense the Association is no less than the total body of individual Unitarians all over the continent, and until the total constituency comes to think of itself as the living body of the denomination we cannot find our real working strength. Whatever helps to develop that consciousness of our inclusive fellowship is today of inestimable value.

A HEALTHY REACTION

ONE of the three Panel Discussions, held simultaneously on Wednesday afternoon during Anniversary Week, spent a very valuable half-hour discussing the question of practical methods for building up among our people and churches a greater interest in denominational affairs. It may have seemed to some of us that too much emphasis is being placed upon such matters; indeed, I have had more than one thoughtful Unitarian protest vigorously against the present tendency to talk about denominational problems and programs. But the over-emphasis of the moment—if it really be such, which I am not at all prepared to concede—is the natural and wholly proper reaction from a long period of excessive under-emphasis. Until very recently many Unitarians scarcely knew that the denomination existed. Some of them appeared to be almost ashamed to admit that they belonged to a larger body at all. The very word Unitarian, if it ever passed their lips, did so with a self-conscious and deprecatory accent that had the effect of an impediment in their speech.

That day is now happily passing into the realm of ancient history. The new spirit among us is free from all taint of narrow sectarianism and exclusive self-satisfaction. It has none of the snobbishness of "the Lord's sweet chosen few"—and

may it perish from the face of the earth if it ever surrenders to that deadly and devastating blight! But it is aware of its own existence and its own right to exist as an instrumentality for the service of religion among men in the twentieth century. It has begun to acquire a new self-respect, and a new sense of high obligation to the world. It has begun to learn that tolerance is something quite different from insipid indifferentism, and it is no longer afraid or ashamed to stand squarely by its own name and heritage and opportunity.

It begins to look as though Unitarianism were passing beyond the stage of awkward and self-conscious adolescence, into the period of adult life and service. It begins to look as though it were actually growing up, ready to face and accept the full responsibilities of manhood in a world where childishness is no longer tolerable because there is man's work to be done and man's burdens to be carried.

F. M. E.

Volume I UNITARIAN HORIZONS Number 10

Published by The Beacon Press, Inc. on the fifteenth day of each month from September to June inclusive.

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION
25 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass.
FREDERICK M. ELIOT, *President* PARKER E. MAREAN, *Treasurer*

Printed in the U. S. A.